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ABSTRACT

Pupils need to experience a quality literature program which stresses diverse cultures. A major goal of a quality multi-cultural literature program is to develop within pupils feelings of empathy, acceptance, understanding, and the wish to interact with persons whose value systems, beliefs, and thought might well differ from others in society. In a unit on Multi-cultural Literature (taught by a student teacher), pupils discussed in depth the contents of readings; presented oral reports that truly captured the interests of learners; and developed drawings, mural, and tape recordings based on readings. Numerous other pupils presented interesting means of reporting on content read in a trade book of their own choosing, including creative dramatics presentations, a formal dramatization, and a pantomime. As pupils study and achieve in a multi-cultural literature curriculum, they increase skills in word recognition, in comprehension especially in higher levels of cognition, and in attitudes. (RS)

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MIDDLE SCHOOL MULTI-CULTURAL LITERATURE

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Pupils need to experience a quality literature program which stresses divers cultures. A democracy which has numerous cultural groups should emphasize learning about and appreciating others. It is indeed an opportunity in learning which provides pupils a literature curriculum including a study of minority groups in society. Thus pupil should have first hand experiences in learning about African Americans, Latinos, and native Americans, among others.

In an atmosphere of respect, pupils should have ample opportunities to work together with minority learners. When emphasizing the project method, pupils need to work harmoniously together with other minority culture learners. This would be true of the following additional kinds of activities;

1. Discussing literature read emphasizing multiple cultures.
2. Elaborating on content read using a seminar method of teaching.
3. Developing an art project covering subject matter read.
4. Dramatizing main ideas read in literature.
5. Presenting an oral report individually or within a committee containing salient ideas read.

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The Literature Curriculum

The teacher must have a variety of trade books on multiple cultures. These trade books should be on diverse reading levels so that each pupil may select one to read that is on his/her reading and

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understanding level. Trade books should also contain diverse topics such as recreation, education, occupations and vocations, and personal experiences of multi-cultural groups. Learners may then choose the area of interest to read on in terms of subject mater content.

A student teacher (ST) supervised by the writer taught a unit on Multi-cultural Literature. Three middle school pupils had read "Andy's Run" and in a seminar approach discussed in depth its contents. The writer was amazed at the depth of understanding learners had of the inherent subject matter. These middle school pupils identified and discussed relevant problem areas including the following questions;

1. Why was Florida in the 1920's an unsafe place for African Americans? Why is racial discrimination still practiced today in the United States? The flag salute was brought into the discussion including the phrase "with liberty and justice for all."
2. Why did Andy believe that God was big, black, kind, and wise?
3. What makes one happy as well as sad when reading about Andy?
4. What made Andy persevere rather than give up in life with so many adversities?

`Another pupil had read "Journey of the Swallow" and desired to present an oral report on its contents. Standards to follow in giving an oral report were the following;

1. have the content well in mind.
2. use the outline you prepared if necessary.
3. speak clearly so all can hear the content presented.
4. look at the audience when giving the report.

The pupil giving the oral report truly captured the interests of learners when telling of a family that escaped from El Salvador during the civil war in that nation. Family members entered Mexico illegally. The three oldest children reached Chicago riding in a crate on a truck. Being without money and the inability to speak English, the three faced undue hardships. They hear from Mexico that their mother had been sent

back to El Salvador. Maria, who tells the story, in a daring manner goes back to Mexico to get her younger sister, Teresa. This is a story of courage, determination, and responsibility. Listeners raised many questions covering content in the story. These included;

1. Why was the civil war fought between opposing sides in El Salvador?
2. Why was it so difficult to flee El Salvador and go to the United States, by way of Mexico?
3. Why are wars used to settle disputes among nations?
4. What happens to people who are returned to their native country against their will?

Another pupil made a cassette recording and developed related drawings, four in sequence, on the trade book "Undying Glory." The author of the trade book writes about 186,000 black men who fought 449 battles during the Civil War. These men were in the 54 th Massachusetts Regiment who come from 22 states. President Abraham Lincoln was to have said that without freed slaves as soldiers, the Civil War could not have been won.

The illustrations and cassette recording were placed at an interest center whereby learners might volunteer to listen to the tape using head phones. One pupil who listened to the tape at the center said in a discussion that all should hear the contents on the tape and view the illustrations. Many learners read this trade book voluntarily as a result of what pupils said as to its merits. None had realized the tremendous contributions made by African Americans during the Civil War. One pupil found additional information on African American Civil War contributions from an encyclopedia. The ST believed it good to have pupil products such as the tape and illustrations at a learning center so that the latter may experience enrichment activities on an individual basis. The writer truly believes this approach worked well in sharing what has been read with others on a voluntary basis in which a learner chooses to read what the reporter said and reported in the tape and view the related drawings that were made.

Four pupils read 'The Slave Dancer' and developed a mural on its contents. After cooperative planning, the following was placed in the mural using a variety of media;

1. Jessie Bollier was kidnapped in New Orleans and placed on a slave ship.
2. He played the fife for slaves to exercise to the music.
3. The Moonlight, the ship that Jessie is on, was shipwrecked off the coast of Mississippi.
4. Jessie and a slave are the only two individuals that survive the catastrophe.

When describing their mural to the other middle school pupils, the four learners were asked the following questions;

1. How was Jessie kidnapped?
2. How did he learn to play the fife? This must have been difficult to do since slaves in most cases were expected to do the heavy manual labor.
3. What kind of exercise did slaves engage in? So frequently, slaves were chained to the bottom of a ship, face up, when coming to the United States from Africa.
4. Why did the ship "The Moonlight" experience destruction in a shipwreck?
5. How did Jessie and one slave manage to survive the shipwreck?

Numerous other middle school pupils also presented interesting means of reporting on content read in a trade book of their very own choosing, individually or within a committee. These included a creative dramatics presentation, a formal dramatization, and a pantomime.

In Closing

Middle school pupils need to experience a challenging and purposeful multi-cultural literature curriculum. Learning about other cultures and times has its every own fascination and interest. Improved human relations and acceptance of all people should be an ultimate goal

here. As pupils study and achieve in a multi-cultural literature curriculum, they increase skills in word recognition, in comprehension especially higher levels of cognition, and in attitudes.